

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

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UNCLAS BEIRUT 14281

USIA FOR IPA/M, IBS, IPS, INA

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, PFOR, LEUS

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: LEBANESE AMERICAN RELATIONS

SUMMARY: PARLIAMENTARY FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT CONDEMNING "INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT" TOWARD PRESIDENT FRANJIEH IN NEW YORK WIDELY AND FACTUALLY REPORTED IN THURSDAY PRESS, WHICH QUOTED EXTENSIVELY FROM FONMIN TAQLA'S ACCOUNT OF ENTIRE INCIDENT. VIRTUALLY NO EDITORIAL COMMENT. FRIDAY PRESS CARRIED LITTLE ON SUBJECT OTHER THAN REPORTS IN TWO PAPERS APPARENTLY BASED ON REMARKS BY HIS SON-IN-LAW THAT PRESIDENT FRANJIEH NOT INTERESTED IN VISITING U.S. END SUMMARY

1. DAILY PRESS COVERAGE OF LEBANESE-U.S. "CRISIS" REACHED HIGH WATER MARK THURSDAY WITH DETAILED ACCOUNTS IN MOST PAPERS OF PARLIAMENTARY FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE SESSION.

2. REPORTING WAS FACTUAL AND INCLUDED FONMIN TAQLA'S PRESENTATION OF REPORT ON EVENTS AT NEW YORK AIRPORT. REPORT, PREPARED BY PUBLIC SECURITY DIRECTOR ANTOINE DAHDAH, DID NOT DIFFER FROM ACCOUNT PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED IN AL BAYRAQ NEWSPAPER. TAQLA ALSO SAID A MEETING WAS HELD FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT BETWEEN DG OF PRESIDENCY BUTROS DIB AND A SENIOR

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STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL, WHO WAS TOLD THAT WHAT HAPPENED

WAS UNACCEPTABLE AND THAT PRESIDENT FRANJIEH WAS DISPLEASED.

3. PRESS QUOTED TAQLA AS STRESSING TWO POINTS: FIRST, THAT "INCIDENT HAS REMAINED, AND MUST REMAIN, COMPLETELY ISOLATED FROM OVERALL RELATIONS BETWEEN LEBANON AND U.S. ON ALL LEVELS" SINCE THESE RELATIONS "HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY CORDIALITY AND FRIENDSHIP DESPITE THE DIFFERENT CONVICTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD SOME QUESTIONS, NOTABLY THE PALESTINIAN CASE." SECOND, THE INCIDENT WAS NOT RELATED TO RECEPTION FORMALITIES. "WE DID NOT ASK FOR ANYONE TO COME NOR DID WE EXPECT ANYONE REPRESENTING THE AMERICAN AUTHORITIES TO RECEIVE THE PRESIDENT AT THE AIRPORT, BECAUSE WE WERE AWARE OF THE REGULATIONS IN THIS CASE."

4. PAPERS ALSO QUOTED COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN AMIN HAFEZ SAYING THAT BECAUSE OF ITS ROLE IN PROMOTING ARAB CAUSE LEBANON WAS BOUND TO SUFFER "THORNS ON ITS WAY." HAFEZ STATEMENT WENT ON TO DISCUSS EXTENT OF ZIONIST INFLUENCE IN U.S., AND PAST INCONVENIENCE TO KING FEISAL AND LATE PRESIDENT POMPIDOU IN CONNECTION WITH PLANNED NEW YORK VISITS.

5. PRESS ACCOUNTS ALSO DESCRIBED COMMITTEE'S TWO RESOLUTIONS, ONE PAYING TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT FRANJIEH FOR THIS ROLE AT UN AND OTHER CONDEMNING "INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT" OF AMERICAN OFFICIALS AND STATING THAT "WHATEVER AFFECTS DIGNITY OF HEAD OF STATE ALSO AFFECTS DIGNITY OF ALL LEBANESE, WHICH WE REGARD AS MOST PRECIOUS THING WE HAVE."

6. ONLY EDITORIAL COMMENT ON SUBJECT IN THURSDAY PRESS IS BY LEADING INDEPENDENT AN NAHAR'S ABOU JAOUDE. HE EXPRESSES INDIGNATION AT BOTH EMBASSY AND PRESIDENCY FOR EVEN DISCUSSING HASHISH SMUGGLING REPORT WHICH HE CHARACTERIZES AS TRUMPED UP ATTEMPT TO KEEP PRESIDENT FRANJIEH FROM GOING TO NEW YORK TO PRESENT PALESTINIAN CASE.

7. FRIDAY DAILY PRESS HAS LITTLE IN WAY OF REPORTS OR COMMENTS ON SUBJECT. CONSERVATIVE AL HAYAT QUOTES DEPUTY ABDALLAH RASSI, SON-IN-LAW OF PRESIDENT FRANJIEH, AS TELLING OTHER DEPUTIES IN CORRIDOR DISCUSSION THAT LEBANON COULD NOT HAVE HUSHED UP MATTER BECAUSE "IF STORY HAD LATER COME OUT, LEBANON WOULD HAVE UNCLASSIFIED

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BEEN ACCUSED OF ACCEPTING THE INSULT." RASSI ALSO IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT "AFTER AL THAT PRESIDENT FRANJIEH HAS EXPERIENCED DURING HIS VISIT, IT IS INCONCEIVABLE THAT HE WILL VISIT THE U.S. AGAIN EVEN IN RESPONSE TO AN INVITATION FROM PRESIDENT FORD.

8. PRO-IRAQ BEIRUT ALSO QUOTES "PARLIAMENATRY SOURCES" AS SAYING PRESIDENT FRANJIEH WILL NOT VISIT U.S.

COMMENT: COVERAGE OF SUBJECT MAY HAVE RUN ITS COURSE  
IN MAJOR DAILIES UNLESS POLITICAL FIGURES CHOOSE TO RAISE IT AGAIN.  
HOWEVER, WE CAN EXPECT WEEKLIES AND PERHAPS SOME SMALLER  
DAILIES TO KEEP SUBJECT ALIVE FOR NEXT FEW DAYS AND, IN VIEW THEIR  
HIGHLY COMPETITIVE SITUATION, PERHAPS EMBELLISH  
DETAILS OR SPECULATE ON FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN U.S.-  
LEBANESE RELATIONS. HOUGHTON

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